

September 13, 2021

Dear Families,

Welcome to the 2021–2022 school year—our long-awaited homecoming!

I am beyond excited to begin our historic return to full-time, in-person instruction—after the most challenging 18 months of our lives. This year, the first day of school means everything to me. Not only because I'm your Schools Chancellor, but because I'm also the mother of a New York City public high school student who is over the moon to return to the classroom full time.

My daughter's experience is a living, breathing testament to what I've learned in more than 20 years as an educator: nothing replaces the experience between a child and a teacher in a classroom. That is why it feels like a dream come true to welcome all our children back to safe, supportive, rigorous school environments. The first day of school is a true homecoming for our school communities.

I know that COVID-19 and the Delta variant are on all our minds, and I want to be clear that the health and safety of our children, families, and school staff is our highest priority. For the last several months, we have worked with school leaders, public health experts, and union partners to develop and health and safety approach that provides multiple layers of scientifically proven prevention strategies.

We are meeting or exceeding Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting surface areas in our schools, inspection and certification of ventilation in our buildings, and regular random testing of staff and students for COVID-19. We know masks work to reduce the spread of disease, and we are requiring all students and staff to wear face coverings when riding on school buses and anywhere on school property, indoors and outdoors. This is regardless of vaccination status unless students have a medical exemption.

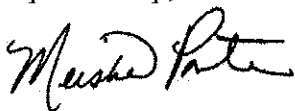
The most important step you can take to protect you and your family from COVID-19 is vaccination. All New Yorkers ages 12 and older can receive a free COVID-19 vaccine. In partnership with the NYC Test & Trace Corps and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, all school sites serving children 12 and over are offering Pfizer-BioNTech vaccinations to eligible New Yorkers during the first week of school (with second doses provided at the beginning of October). No appointment is needed, and you can learn more about site hours from your school or by visiting schools.nyc.gov/covid19.

You can find the most up-to-date information on how we're working to keep students and staff healthy and safe on the DOE's website for school year 2021–22 at schools.nyc.gov/homecoming.

I hope you are as thrilled as I am about the first day of school. You can be sure I'll be out visiting classrooms throughout the week, welcoming back our students, families, and educators—and celebrating all we have done to get to this point.

As always, I am honored to have you at my side as we usher in our most important first day of school ever. Thank you for entrusting your children to us.

In partnership,



Meisha Porter
New York City Schools Chancellor



**Department of
Education**
Chancellor Meisha Porter

NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT YOU WILL SEE IN SEPTEMBER

Your Child Will Feel Welcomed, and Helped to Heal from the Past Year

Children in every community are carrying trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A successful academic recovery can only happen when the emotional and mental health needs of students are also addressed.

- We will hire over 500 new social workers and other mental health support staff so that your child's school has at least one social worker or school-based mental health clinic.
- We will begin adding over 130 new community schools to provide expanded social, emotional, academic, and extracurricular services in communities where they're most needed.

Your Child's Literacy Skills Will Be a Priority

Literacy and reading are absolutely fundamental to children's ability to reach important milestones all along the educational journey. Our goal is to have every student reading on grade level by the end of 2nd grade.

- If you have a child in kindergarten through grade 2, their teachers will use a tool to identify strengths and challenges at the beginning of the year, and develop support plans tailored to their specific needs.
- Thousands of teachers in these grades will receive extra training to support literacy.
- 140 more teachers will be hired to reduce class sizes at 72 elementary schools with the specific goal of improving reading proficiency.
- We will bring the number of reading coaches in our successful Universal Literacy coaching program to 500 so every early childhood and K-2 classroom has one.
- In addition, we will give schools funding for targeted supports for students, such as , extended day and enrichment activities.

Your Child Will Grow Their Technological Skills

This September, we will build on what we have learned about the benefits of technology. Students will develop digital skills to prepare them for the new economy.

- We will distribute an additional 175,000 devices so every K-12 student who needs one has access to one.
- We will launch an eighth-grade technology project for students to demonstrate their digital literacy skills.
- We will train 5,000 K-12 teachers to teach computer science coursework.
- We will expand Computer Science for All, to support computational thinking, problem-solving, and digital skills for 400,000 students by 2024.

More Special Education Support Will Be Available for Students with Disabilities

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on our students with disabilities. The Academic Recovery Plan will make every resource available to better support students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), from our youngest learners to students preparing for graduation:

- We will launch afterschool and Saturday programs for students with IEPs to receive additional instruction and related services.
- We will add 800 Special Education Pre-K seats and expand Committees on Preschool Special Education to review more IEP requests.
- We will provide eligible students ages 21+ with either continued instruction toward their diploma or other credential, or consultation about plans for college and career readiness.
- We will also continue to provide family workshops and information sessions through our Beyond Access Series, which supports families of students with disabilities by providing sessions on topics related to special education.



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More Language Support Will Be Available to Multilingual Learners

Multilingual learners (MLs) and immigrant families are valued and supported at DOE. We will provide culturally responsive supports that give students and their families equitable access to resources and opportunities that help students succeed inside and outside the classroom.

- We will establish Immigrant Ambassador Programs across 30 high schools to match immigrant DOE students with college students for mentorship.
- Schools will be provided resources to purchase print and digital books in students' home languages, and build home language libraries.
- We will provide teachers with training that is specific to the language needs of multilingual learners and immigrant students.
- We will conduct wellness checks and deliver social-emotional learning support to multilingual learners, particularly in transitioning to full time in-person learning.
- We will expand the Postsecondary Readiness for ELLs Program (PREP), to be facilitated by a select group of school counselors and educators.

Your Child Will Get Ready for College and Career

Especially as our students heal from the pandemic, we need to make sure they are better prepared for the next step in life, whether it's college or career.

- We will deliver free, personalized college counseling for every junior and senior after school so that every student has a post-graduation plan. This includes launching Student Success Centers for 34 high schools.
- We will offer Universal College Financial Aid Guidance in multiple languages, to help navigate the application process.
- We will add new Advanced Placement or College Now courses so tens of thousands more students have access to college-level coursework.

Your Child Will Learn Challenging Material That Reflects Who They Are

Children are more engaged in class when they can see themselves in their lessons and materials. We are committed to reflecting the city's "beautiful mosaic" of cultures and histories in curriculum.

- In the fall, your child's school will receive an infusion of books that reflect the variety of histories, languages, and experiences that make up the city.
- The DOE will begin work on universal, rigorous, and inclusive English Language Arts (ELA) and Math curricula that will be shared by New York City's 1,600 schools and one million students. It will be built on investments in literacy and will challenge students to move beyond their academic comfort zones.
- The DOE will begin developing brand new support materials for ELA, Math, Arts and more, developed by New York City educators for New York City students.

To view a copy of this document in your language, visit schools.nyc.gov/messagesforfamilies

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